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ABSTRACT

Many colleges and universities are using a service-learning paradigm to structure service learning experiences for their students to reinforce and enhance the understanding of course material. Two studies were undertaken at a parochial college to address the benefits to students who perform service as part of their curricular studies. In the first study, 28 students in an introductory philosophy course with a service and reflection component, and 28 comparisons in a course without service learning were compared. In the second study, 134 students in 6 classes completed questionnaires about service experience. Results demonstrate the difficulties of demonstrating benefits of service learning, but show that using comparison groups is a useful approach. Results from quantitative and qualitative analyses show that service learning has benefits for late adolescents, and that engaging in service learning may benefit older and younger students in different ways. Students in the service section of the first study did not report greater gains in attitudes toward personal and social responsibility, but they did appear to have more compassion toward the disadvantaged, more commitment to community work, and a greater belief that they could make a difference. The second study shows that performing service affects students and that the kinds of effects depend, at least in part, on the number, if not the types, of service experiences. Results also suggest that courses that include reflection as a central feature stimulate students' thinking about issues of justice and faith and can effect student decisions about postgraduate plans. (Contains 13 references.) (SLD)

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Evaluating Outcomes of Service-Learning Courses at a Parochial College

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Evaluating Outcomes of Service-Learning Courses at a Parochial College

Service learning, like experiential education, is viewed as a pedagogy that engages the learner directly in the phenomenon being studied in the classroom for the purpose of providing meaningful service to members of the community and enhance participants' own learning and sense of social responsibility (Giles, Honnet, & Migliore, 1991; Kendall, Duley, Little, Permaul, & Rubin, 1986). Using a service-learning paradigm, instructors structure service experiences for their students to reinforce and enhance the understanding of course material

In the past five years, colleges and universities have reported a tremendous increase in the number of students participating in service-learning activities. Conservative estimates indicate that 142,000 college and university students were engaged in part-time community service activities in 1992 (Waller, 1993). To keep pace with this renewed enthusiasm and commitment to service, college officials have established hundreds of community service programs on American college campuses. It is estimated that about 21% of all higher educational institutions now have a college-based service office or department (Waller).

Although only a few colleges and universities report that they have been successful in fully integrating service into the academic curriculum, there are many institutions that have begun to make some inroads into this process (Leary, 1994). A number of institutions such as Stanford University, Georgetown University, and Loyola College in Maryland have committed significant campus resources to develop centers for public and community service. These centers were developed not only to provide opportunities for students to serve their communities (local, state, national and international), but for the purpose of linking service to the more

formal academic environment. These institutions have sought ways to integrate service into the curriculum, as well as to promote faculty and administrative research related to service-learning.

There are important reasons to engage students in service as part of the curriculum. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching concluded in the book College: The Undergraduate Experience in America (Boyer, 1987) that "the quality of the undergraduate experience must be measured by the degree to which it makes a difference in the intellectual and personal lives of its graduates, in the social and civic responsibilities they are willing to assume, and ultimately in their world perspective" (p. 281). In addition, Newman (1985) argued that neither the structure nor the content of our educational system is providing students with a means to link classroom study with social problems and issues and, consequently, he contended, students lack an understanding of their responsibilities of democratic citizenship. In Higher Education and the American Resurgence (1985), Newman wrote, "if there is a crisis in our system of education today, it is less that scores have declined than it is that we have failed to provide the education for citizenship that is still the most significant responsibility of the nation's schools and colleges" (p. 31).

Colleges and universities in this country have responded to this call for a renewed commitment to responsible citizenship by encouraging students who become actively involved in their local, state and global communities (Leary, 1994). Although the methods and level of commitment to community service may vary from one institution to another, the majority of these programs have as their mission to develop in students an awareness of public issues and

community needs, to foster the development of ethical leadership, and to encourage students to assume a lifelong commitment to social responsibility (Kendall, 1990).

Despite the growth in service-learning activities in American colleges and universities, researchers have had difficulty establishing empirically that service-learning provides benefits to students through replicable qualitative and quantitative research (Giles et al., 1991). Reasons cited for this difficulty include the lack of good standardized instruments to measure effects, the problem of identifying adequate comparison groups, the idiosyncratic nature of the benefits derived from service experiences, and the absence of longitudinal studies of participant growth (Giles et al, 1991; Hamilton & Fenzel, 1988). Consequently, few studies have been able to demonstrate the kinds of benefits found by Conrad and Hedin (1981b) in their evaluation of 30 exemplary experiential learning programs in secondary schools in terms of students' social, intellectual, and psychological development.

Most of the research to date on the benefits afforded students of performing service has focused on the impact of service on student growth and development in the co-curricular, out-of-classroom environment, with little attention given to the student learning and development which takes place when service is linked to the more formal academic environment. While the co-curricular research is clearly important, service-learning advocates such as Berry (1990) and Kendall (1990) have contended that the future of community and public service programs on college campuses is directly linked to educators' ability to integrate service into the academic curriculum, and to understand the connections between community service and more formal academic learning.

The present studies were undertaken, in part, to address some of the difficulties experienced by research on the effects of service learning to date and to address the benefits to students who perform service as part of their curricular studies. The first study utilized two groups of students--one that participated in a service experience as part of the course and one that participated in the same course with the same instructor, but with a replacement activity for the service component. In addition, the study employed pencil-and-paper measures used in previous research as well as interview data from students and the instructor. The second study examined student and instructor evaluations of the effects of participation in service learning in five different service-learning courses during the spring semester at the same institution.

Method

Study I

Participants. Students enrolled in two different sections of the same course in introductory philosophy participated in the first study. This course was selected for the study because of its focus on issues of economic class, poverty, power, and racism, and because the instructor was willing to participate and to provide access to students taking the course. The service section, which met 3 days per week at 11 AM, contained 28 students (7 men and 21 women), and the comparison section, which met at 12 noon on the same days, contained 29 students (9 men and 20 women). The earlier section of the course was chosen as the service section to eliminate the potential bias of the instructor doing a better job of presenting material on the second try. Students, nearly all sophomores, self-selected into these sections but had no knowledge of the service component prior to registration.

Course requirements. Students in the service section of the course were asked to participate in an ongoing service-reflection experience of approximately 25 hours. This component included at least 15 hours of an ongoing service experience at a community agency, maintaining a reflection journal, and writing a four-page reflection-synthesis paper at the conclusion of the semester as a way of demonstrating their ability to integrate their service experience with course materials. In lieu of the service-reflection component, students participating in the non-service section of the class were required to read two brief additional philosophical texts on reserve in the library and to write a 5-page paper on each relating them to other course readings, work that was estimated to take an average of 25 hours per student. Students in both sections were exposed to the same lecture content and testing.

Materials. Conrad and Hedin's (1981a) Social and Personal Responsibility Scale (SPRS) and the Defining Issues Test (DIT; Rest, 1986) were used to assess changes in attitudes toward society's and one's own responsibility for meeting the needs of others and changes in moral judgment. The SPRS contains 21 questions with each item rated on a 4-point scale providing a potential range of full scale scores of 21 to 84. The items assess the extent to which participants regard a particular facet of personal or social responsibility as characteristic of themselves. The full SPRS is divided into two subscales for purposes of analysis. The Social Responsibility subscale assesses respondents' attitudes toward society's obligation to meet the needs of others, and the Personal Responsibility subscale assesses respondents' perceptions of their personal responsibility toward others in need and their perception of personal competence to do so. Conrad and Hedin (1981a) reported acceptable reliability (alpha = .73) for

the full scale, as well as for the two subscales for attitudes toward social responsibility at the societal level (alpha=.73) and the personal level (alpha=.68).

The DIT consists of six moral dilemma stories which require students to consider 12 items about each dilemma and to rank the four most important items. Two indices are computed: the P% score which indicates the ranked importance of principled statements and the D score which is an overall index of moral development. Studies by Davison and Robbins (1978) concluded that the test-retest reliabilities for the P and D scores are in the high .70s or .80s. Rest (1986) reported Chronbach alphas of .77 for the P score and .79 for the D score.

Mastery of academic content was assessed using scores on students' final examination. Students' responses to a pencil-and-paper institutional community service questionnaire and semi-structured interview, as well as the instructor's responses to personal interview questions, were also examined.

Secondarily, a number of qualitative methods were utilized for the purpose of obtaining descriptive, anecdotal information to further illuminate the effects of the course experience on participants' moral, civic, and intellectual lives. These methods included: semi-structured interviews with a representative group of students (N=7) from each class, an interview with the course instructor, and a review of the results of the College's standardized course evaluations completed by students. A review of the results of student responses to a community service questionnaire were also conducted. Student interviews were conducted with four women and 3 men from the service section and 5 women and 2 men from the non-service section. Interview participants were chosen using a stratified random sampling method, with gender and posttest DIT scores as the strata.

Study II

Participants. In the second study, 84 students in four sections of three 100- and 200-level courses and 50 students in three sections of two 300-level courses completed questionnaires. The courses represented included those in life sciences (8 students), theology (74 students), and philosophy (52 students). The distribution of students by year was as follows: 20 first-year, 32 second-year, 35 third-year, and 46 fourth-year (1 unknown). Of these 134 respondents, 64 (48%) reported having no previous service involvement, 34 (25%) reported 1 or 2 prior services experiences, and the remaining 36 (27%) reported 3 or more previous service experiences. Information on students' gender was not requested.

Materials. For the second study, students responded to a single two-page pencil-and-paper questionnaire administered at the end of the semester by the college's community service center. On the questionnaire, respondents rated aspects of the service-learning experience such as the extent and quality of training they received, and the extent to which the service work contributed to learning course material and course material contributed to the service experience. Students also indicated their likelihood of continuing community service work. In addition, focus group interviews were conducted with 16 students in one of the theology courses.

Results

Study I

Results of the first study showed no significant differences in gains in social and personal responsibility, $F(1,30) = .47$, ns, or moral judgment, with respect to the P score,

$F(1,33)=3.40$, $p=.074$, and the D score, $F(1,33)=.72$, ns, as assessed by the pencil-and-paper measures, for the two classes of students. In addition, scores on the final examination, which the instructor graded blind to the student's identity or course section, showed no significant difference, $F(1,36)=1.10$, ns.

On the other hand, results of semi-structured interviews of 7 students in each of the two course sections, suggested clear benefits of the service component. For example, one service section student stated "the community service project was important because it provided us with an opportunity to see some of what the authors were really talking about." Unlike students in the non-service section, service-section students reported an attitude of compassion for the disenfranchised of society, a greater level of commitment to wanting to work in their communities to help solve social problems, and a stronger belief that they could make a difference in the lives of others. (On the last point, five of the service section students and two of the non-service section students expressed a belief that their involvement in the community could make a difference.) In addition, five of the seven students interviewed from the service section reported the community service as the most beneficial aspect of the course. Despite the instructor's initial hesitation to introduce a service component to his course, he reported that students in the service section participated more, were more alert and open to wrestling with the complexities of issues, and had a better grasp of the readings in a way that he was not able to measure on the final exam. The examination of the college's standard course evaluation forms of the two sections showed that students in the service section rated all 14 aspects of the course and

the instructor more favorably than did students in the non-service section, a phenomenon that would not be due to chance.

Study II

Results showed that 76% of students rated the community service component of the courses as very good, 23% as so-so, and 1% as not good. In addition, the service experience left 69% of students interested in continuing to participate in service with no students less interested in doing so. To ascertain the extent to which students felt that the service contributed to their learning of course material, a 5-point scale was used (1=not at all, 5=quite a bit). A mean rating of 3.3 (slightly above the middle of the range) indicated that students tended to feel that the service experienced contributed to their learning of course material. Along the same lines, with respect to the extent course material contributed to students' understanding of the service work on the same scale, results showed a mean score of 3.3 (also slightly above the middle of the range), which suggests that course work benefited the service experience for students. Responses of students enrolled in 300-level courses were compared to those of students enrolled in the 100- and 200-level courses. These comparisons showed that the students in the 300-level courses reported a greater influence of service on learning the course material (mean rating of 3.78) as well as greater likelihood of the course material enhancing the service experience (mean rating of 3.53) when compared to students in the 100- and 200-level courses (mean ratings of 2.84 and 3.07 respectively).

A content analysis of student comments was undertaken to determine the kinds of things students felt they learned about from the combination of course work and service.

The most frequently cited category of learning was learning about people or the conditions under which people lived (N=38). This kind of learning included learning about what it is like to be poor or homeless, to live in the city, or to be elderly. A considerable number of students also reported learning more about themselves (N=21) and others indicated that they learned that "people are people" and not very different from ourselves, regardless of circumstance (N=20).. Other students learned that they could make a difference in the lives of others (N=11). Only a few reported that they learned nothing (N=9) and very few reported learning to "count my blessings," a response that may tap into students' guilt feelings. Several students (not counted) reported finding Bible passages come to life, but it was not clear just what students meant by such a comment.

Of particular note were the comments (N=15) that suggested a higher-order learning, which is to say an integration of experience and philosophy, an application of theoretical principles to real-life situations, or learning that transcends surface experience. Examples of this kind of learning might include the need for policy that promotes justice or an understanding of inherent racism in the social system. This higher-order learning was much more likely to be found among the students enrolled in the 300-level courses (N=12) than in other courses (N=3), Chi-square(df=1)=5.40, $p<.05$.

Focus group interviews with the 16 students in a 300-level theology course entitled Spirituality and Service were conducted at the end of the semester. Most of these students had 3 to 4 years of experience in a variety of service activities, and many of them had undertaken leadership roles in service. Similar to the comments made on the written evaluations, students in the focus groups mentioned the learning of many things. Among

these were aspects of people: how one can persist with determination when one has so little, that one can live well in a simple fashion, and that there are many similarities among people from various backgrounds and socioeconomic levels. Students indicated how the people they worked with inspired them with their thankfulness and determination. Some students appeared to be in awe of the personal power they experienced in touching people. Others were touched by such things as the desire of adults to learn to read in order to read the Bible. Some students reported benefiting from the combination of reading and service; reading about social justice was mentioned specifically. The kinds of comments that showed that these students were touched by the people they served in service clearly distinguished these students from those in the other classes whose reflections were captured in their written comments. Students were particularly touched by the way in which economically disadvantaged people in Appalachia and Mexico, who had so very little materially, managed to be so strong and committed to living, and to be living in a simple fashion. (These students had participated in co-curricular immersion service experiences in these two locations.)

Some of the interviewed students indicated that they had reevaluated their career aspirations as a result of service. One student reported the desire to work in an occupation that directly serves people in need. Others had decided to perform a year or more of service work after graduation, some against the wishes of their parents. Several students reported that they learned that service can be incorporated in daily living and expressed a call to do so.

What was most impressive about the focus interviews was students' numerous and thoughtful references to spirituality in service. Several students identified a mandate to be instruments of God through service, that to serve is to follow the example of Jesus, or to be Christlike, or to fulfill the call of being Christian. Others expressed the view that the performance of service and the pursuit of changing the world as a moral responsibility. Many experienced an increase in the depth of the questions about the plight of the downtrodden, what it means to be Christian, and where God fits into the picture that service triggered. Others went even deeper it seemed. One student used the term "faith challenges" to describe the effects of immersion outreaches. One student described the dilemma she experienced feeling that God had abandoned her and other people, but subsequently learning through her experience that such was not the case. Another raised the challenge of balancing one's responsibilities as a Christian and a taxpaying citizen.

Discussion

Results from the present pair of studies reinforce much of what we know already about the difficulties in demonstrating benefits of service learning but also shows that studies utilizing comparison groups are quite possible and beneficial. Results from quantitative and qualitative analyses show that service learning has benefits for late adolescents and that it would appear that engaging in service learning activities may benefit younger, less experienced students in different ways than older, more experienced students.

In the first study, a quasi-experimental study the effects of incorporating service into an introductory philosophy course on students' attitudes and performance in the course, students in the service section of the course did not report greater gains in attitudes

toward social and personal responsibility or moral attitudes than did students in a non-service section of the course on pencil-and-paper measures, contrary to predictions. However, findings from interviews with a stratified random sample of students in the two course sections suggest clear gains for the service-learning students in terms of a stronger attitude of compassion for the disenfranchised of society, a greater level of commitment to wanting to work in their communities to help solve social problems, and a stronger belief that they could make a difference in the lives of others. In addition, the instructor reported that the service-section students demonstrated a better grasp of the readings and more openness to grappling with the complexities of issues of justice in class discussions, as compared to students in the non-service course section. Although instructor bias needs to be considered a possible confound, its effects may be minimized by the fact that the instructor had no previous experience with service learning and no expressed beliefs that students would benefit from the service.

Results of this first study underscore the difficulty in quantifying changes in students' attitudes toward the importance of society meeting the needs of those who are not able to help themselves and in students' levels of moral reasoning and understanding of issues of social justice, despite qualitative evidence of such gains. These results underscore also the need to develop better pencil-and-paper instruments that are sensitive to such changes when they take place. The lack of differences in pencil-and-paper measures of moral development and changes in social and personal responsibility may be attributed also to the absence of reflection as a component of the service-learning experience in the present study. (Reflection was omitted in order to make the two course sections as similar

as possible.) Reflecting on service experiences has been an important aspect of service learning that contributes to student benefits from service experiences (e.g., Jacoby, 1996; Kendall, 1990).

It was clear from the results of the second study, an evaluation of 134 students enrolled in seven service-learning classes, that performing service affects students and that the kinds of effects depend, at least in part, on the number, if not the types, of experiences of service involvement. Students who were enrolled in the 100- and 200-level courses, who were for the most part younger and less experienced in service than students enrolled in the 300-level courses, felt their eyes opened to some social realities of how people live and what economically disadvantaged people were like. They felt that they learned something about themselves as well, although they were less likely to articulate what that was.

It would appear that as the students are afforded more experiences of service (acknowledging that there is likely to be some personal choice involved in choosing such experiences), they are more likely to interpret service in light of readings or theory or in light of scripture or the call of Christianity. Many of these more experienced students felt the call to be "instruments of God" in their lives through service.

Something particularly striking about the students enrolled in the Spirituality and Service seminar, a service capstone course of sorts, is that, even with the considerable amount of service in which most of them had been involved prior to the class, they continued to learn more from the service experience they were

engaged in during that semester. This class also appeared to benefit the students in being able to put their service work, in particular the immersion experiences, in a faith context.

Service appears to have an initial eye-opening effect on students as they collect data about what other people are like and how they live. Beyond these early experiences, students appear to attempt to make sense of this data in terms of academic readings, their own lives, and of Christian principles. They also become touched by the workers and clients with whom they interact. If they continue to perform service, it is likely intentional either because they feel a call to do so or because they want to make sense of what they are experiencing. The co-curricular immersion experiences lead them to even bigger questions about their social and political world, themselves and their place in that world, and God and God's will for them. The Spirituality and Service seminar appears to have been an important reflective vehicle for many students involved in large amounts of service to open themselves up to larger, more personally and spiritually challenging questions.

In addition to the different effects that experienced and relatively inexperienced students-in-service that service learning appears to have, results of the present study suggest that courses that include reflection as a central feature stimulate students' thinking about issues of justice and faith and can have effects on decisions students make about post-graduation plans.

The field of service-learning research continues to require much attention toward documenting cognitive, moral, spiritual, and social changes that students experience as a

result of performing service as part of an academic course, as well as the kinds of service experiences afforded students, the amount of time students spend in service, and the contributions of other aspects of the course, such as preparation and reflection, to these changes. Additional issues for program and research efforts to address include the integration of co-curricular and curricular service activities and their effects, methods of maximizing student benefits from service learning through the incorporating the theory and practice of leadership, and sequencing service-learning courses to capitalize on developmental changes in college students with respect to cognitive, moral, and spiritual domains.

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